

Some Troubles You Expect, Others Are Little Extra Bonuses

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2-13-69

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MERTZON — If two days in a row like this one ever hit this outfit, the salvage value of the entire ranch won't be enough to handle the overhead on a hobo jungle. Everything has gone wrong. What's wired together is falling to pieces; what's held in form by live tissue is in worse shape.

The ewes are either suffering from the mid-winter hollow disease or coming down with dry weather pinkeye. Most of the old cows are ruining their lungs, complaining about the size of their daily handout.

To get the misery really rolling, earlier this morning a new bull broke his hind leg in the stifle joint. Without ever having sired his first calf, this speedy tax write-off changed from a breeding animal to a candidate for being ground into wieners.

Then, while the bull was being loaded, a foolish herder hung his wedding ring in the trailer gate and ended up as bad off as the bull. We lost over an hour of valuable time sawing the ring off. It took three men to get it loose. And it's going to take additional manpower to mop the blood off the back porch. Even as we were working on the hombre's finger, the ill-fated ox was pitching around in the trailer, shrinking at the rate of 25 cents every 10 minutes.

Of course, crippled cowhands, unlike broken-legged bulls, can't be sent to the packers. Whatever the doctor charges for the finger job will be dead expense. Getting mixed up with wedding bands has always caused mankind a host of problems, but I never thought it could be this bad.

All ranch overhead is high enough to make news around the high-stepping government offices in Washington. In the winter it's all outgo and no income. It'll be way past spring before the ranch needs a deposit slip. And events like the aforementioned make a man wish he was an airline pilot on the Miami run instead of being a wet nurse to a bunch of careless cowhands and broke-down livestock.

Tomorrow will have to be a better day. We'll save a little money by the pickup being in town, transporting the incapacitated bull and the four-fingered cowhand. Missing a feed run could pay part of the doctor bill, and maybe the return on the bull will take care of the rest. The scene looks mighty bleak. However, to live in this Shortgrass country you have to take the hard knocks along with the long falls.